

Book Reviews

Hamilton, Victor P., **The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, 522 pp, hard, \$27.95) reviewed by Charles E. McLain

Hamilton's volume is the newest addition to the *NICOT* series. As the author notes in his preface, this volume joins "numerous commentaries on Genesis already available that deserve the label of *opus magnum*"; however, it is a worthy and welcomed addition.

This volume is clearly and concisely arranged and contains many features that prove a valuable aid to any student of Genesis. Hamilton provides an introduction of one hundred pages, he includes an extensive bibliography, four thorough indices, and frequent footnotes which the serious student of Genesis will find most helpful in pursuing further study.

Along with his clear commentary, he brings each section of discussion to a conclusion with a section entitled "The New Testament Appropriation." In this section he deals with Old Testament quotations, terminology, illustrations, doctrines, and so forth which are found in the New Testament. Although each section is brief, they serve as refreshing reminders that like every other Old Testament book, Genesis does not exist in and of itself but is part of the sacred text of the New Testament Church and New Testament Christians.

Although some of Hamilton's explanations may strike the reader as unique or even odd, I would recommend this volume as a welcomed addition to the library of any pastor or student who wished to seriously study the book of Genesis.

Larkin, William J., Jr., **Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, 401 pp, paper \$19.95) reviewed by Gordon H. Lovik

As a result of cross-cultural missions and publications from many areas of the world the question of culture and its influence on proper

interpretation is an important part of the current hermeneutical debate. The author masterfully sets forth the issue of hermeneutics and culture from the non-evangelical perspective, the evangelical perspective, and the missiological approach. As expected it becomes clear that diversity of viewpoints exist in all theological camps. The author maintains that the Bible must be interpreted in its context unless the Bible states otherwise. Of particular help are the discussions in part 5, *Biblical Theology of Hermeneutics* and part 6, *Hermeneutical Guidelines*. These parts discuss Culture, Context, Revelation and Truth, Language and Meaning, Scripture and Spirit, Sin, Preunderstanding, and the Hermeneutical Bridge, Interpretation, Application, and Contextualization. Helpful applications and contemporary application conclude the author's discussion. The reading is not easy because reflection is required. For anyone desiring a grasp of the contemporary issues in hermeneutics from a conservative author this volume is must reading.

Linnemann, Eta, *Historical Criticism of the Bible Methodology or Ideology?*, trans. by Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990, 169 pp, paper, \$9.95) reviewed by Gordon H. Lovik

As a student of Rudolph Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs the author became totally immersed in the historical critical philosophy that characterizes most European learning. Having spent her entire academic career in teaching and writing from this anti-Bible perspective, she is well prepared to critique the assumptions of this system. After her retirement she came to know Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior. She immediately trashed her written works (she advises others to do the same). At the present time she is involved in teaching in a Bible institute in Indonesia with a complete belief in the word of God rather than the disbelief which characterized her instruction in Germany.

She carefully exposes the anti-Christian approach of the university both ancient and modern. Care is taken to suggest a Bible-centered approach for modern university studies in Christian schools. To her "thought is not autonomous. . . . The theory of the autonomy of thought disregards the fact that man is a creature, created for God and therefore dependent on him." This is contrary to modern thinking but very consistent with God's Word.

The second part of the volume is an attack on modern historical-critical theology. The author clearly shows how this system brings with it the destruction of students with a personal faith in God's Word. Her work is a clarion call to evangelicals to reject this methodology. I found her thoughts to be very timely and thorough as one who spent most of her life inside "the system." Having read her work on parables many years ago, it was exciting to read of her newly acquired faith and the courage to expose so clearly the

presuppositions of the ungodly secular university and college educational system. I recommend this to all students, pastors and educators.

Martin, Grant, **Regaining Control: When Good Things Become Addictions** (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990, 192 pp, paper, \$7.95)
reviewed by Dr. John M. Garber

It is obvious to the author and certainly a reality to all who get involved as Christians ministering to each other that many of us have lost the ability to manage significant portions of our lives. The stated purpose of this book is to educate and awaken the Christian community to the facts of addictive behavior. The book also is about hope. A realization of the loss of control is a requirement to overcome the inability to accomplish any quick solutions or cures.

In the first chapter the author shows addiction to be a process that takes more and more of a persons energy and resources to the point that it can become destructive and even fatal. A basic thing about human nature is that we tend to want to do things that are rewarding and positive and avoid things that are negative or hurt. The ups and downs of life are not always controllable. The addict tries to control uncontrollable events and engages in a particular object or event to produce a mood change, thinking he can control the cycle.

Chapters two through eight each deal with what the author identifies as: Romance Addiction, Relationship Addiction, Sexual Addiction, Eating Addiction, Power Addiction, Religious Addiction and Activity Addiction. Christians with leadership ability, especially pastors, would do well to carefully read the chapter on Power Addiction. The chapter on Activity Addiction has invaluable pages dealing with the problem of spending addiction which has myriads of lives and homes in disarray.

This reviewer, in getting into the major of the book, felt that he was reading more of a psychological approach to the problems than a Biblical one. Perhaps this insight is good in identifying the problems. However he was pleased to find in the concluding chapter a soundly Biblical program for regaining control through what the author calls twelve steps to recovery. This process is well supported with Scripture.

One major exception this reviewer would take with the solutions is the recommendations to reach outside the Christian community for the help of support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Homosexuals Anonymous, etc. While it is wrong for Christians to be independent of each other, in seeking to overcome sinful habits or addictions, we ought not rely on the support of the unregenerate community who cannot properly identify sin much less overcome it by their own skills or power.

The book has good value for pastors and laymen who would minister to others. The material might be found useful for small study groups or Sunday

School classes. It may well awaken any reader to addictions or tendencies toward addictions he was not aware of or perhaps was unwilling to admit in his own life.

McKnight, Scot, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, 141 pp, paper, \$6.95) reviewed by Gordon H. Lovik

To all who spend time studying the Bible it becomes obvious that all of the books of the New Testament are not of the same literary style. For example, it is obvious that Epistles are different than the Gospels. Consequently the author has become the editor of a new set of exegesis tools to aid students and pastors. This volume concentrates on the first three gospels and introduces steps to be taken in proper interpretation of the text. He properly introduces questions that have been raised concerning synoptic study and provides a select bibliography. In accepting Markan priority the author discusses a way to mark a harmony. He then shows how to use textual criticism and more recent trends being followed in exegesis (grammatical analysis, historical, form, and redaction criticism). He suggests a method of word and motif analysis which can provide the student with helpful skills and an awareness of the latest methodology. The work is evangelical and will provide for growth in interpretative skills. As in all works of this sort every suggestion will not be met with equal acceptance. Particularly helpful is his motif analysis of the discipleship motif in Matthew. Most students want the fruit of exegesis but here is a tool setting forth procedures to be a better interpreter of God's Word.

Sacks, Robert D., *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Volume 6: Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies*, (Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1990, 430 pp, hard, \$79.95) reviewed by Charles E. McLain

In the preface and introduction to his book, Sacks makes two comments which go a long way in explaining the content of his commentary. First, he explains the impetuous behind this volume. This commentary is the result of a series of weekly discussions with his friend Professor Leo Strauss, who in turn was the student of Maimonides. This work is the result of what Sacks admits is his "all-too-poor recollections of those conversations" (p. i) which have been augmented over the years by his own thoughts. Second, he comments that he finds it impossible to "discourse concerning Methods of Interpretation" (p. ii). His reasoning rings of soundness, he wishes to avoid the "danger of reading the book by a method foreign to the intent of the

author." However, at the same time he admits the danger of chasing down blind alleys and meeting with disappointments.

The content of this work might best be described as a patchwork of varying depth. Perhaps Sacks' "all-too-poor recollections" account for the very uneven examination of the material in Genesis. While some verses are given several paragraphs of explanation, other passages of Genesis are simply passed over. Sacks' patchwork of comments include much material of Rabbinic origin; several references to Greek philosophy, mythology, literature, and illustrations; ancient Near Eastern parallels/connections; critical methodological conclusions; etc.

The resulting commentary includes much that the conservative student of Genesis would find totally unacceptable. Some examples of this patchwork follow: It is pointed out that the original sin in creation was not committed by man but by the earth (pp. 8, 14). On page 18, Sacks following critical methods, comments, "Regardless of their source, the author or redactor thought it necessary to include both [creation] accounts. This decision implies that he did not believe either one of the accounts to be literally true" In discussing the rivers associated with Eden in chapter 4, Sacks concludes that since "the rivers all run in different directions" then the "Garden of Eden can be reached by going in any direction"; that is, "it is just beyond every hill." However, because man does not know where to begin his journey it is a "never to be reached goal." The cherubim guarding the way to the garden after Adam and Eve's expulsion were "pagan being[s]." Sacks goes beyond proposing a dependence of the Biblical flood account on the Gilgamesh epic when he states "the Biblical author tries to show us what he [Gilgamesh] was really like" (p. 52). On page 52 we are told that the "giants" of 6:4 "will live through the Flood" while on page 57 we are told that the totality of the flood's destruction is emphasized. Throughout the person of God is presented as somewhat inept. Thus, God is apparently caught off guard following man's creation (p. 35-36). Finding man "too noble" to be placed in the setting available to him, God attempts "to *rectify* the situation by planting the Garden." After the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, Sacks notes that "life outside the Garden is not quite as hard as God's warning would have led us to believe." Apparently God was not clear in His explanation or perhaps was not accurate. On page 51, we are told that in the pre-Flood world "God had made *suggestions* from time to time, but they were never enforced." According to Sacks, Noah presents God with a "problem" that requires a "compromise" on God's part. God is almost portrayed as operating on the basis of trial and error.

The lack of footnotes, bibliography, and indices makes the book practically useless for the student of Genesis. This reviewer was also dismayed by the lack of quality of workmanship of the volume he reviewed. Several pages were uncut and many more were not separated.

Walton, John H., *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, a division of Zondervan Publishing House, 1989, 249 pp, hard, \$19.95) reviewed by Charles E. McLain

This volume is a welcomed "oasis" in the vast expanses of contemporary critical evaluations concerning the sources of Israel's sacred Scripture and its relationship to the literature of the world in which Israel found itself. The question which this book seeks to address is whether Israel's sacred writings were or were not dependent on her neighbors? Did the authors of Scripture borrow from texts, ideas, forms, vocabulary, practices, etc. already existing in neighboring lands? What was the extent of the dependence or borrowing (if any)?

Walton states in his introduction that "the basic premise of this book is that Israel, while being the recipient of divine revelation that gave her a unique theological distinctiveness, reflected in many ways the culture of the ancient Near East. Such a reflection implies that Israelite thinking cannot be understood in isolation from its ancient Near Eastern cultural context." [p. 13]. In order to make this comparison he proposes a "genre oriented" comparison in which he proposes to evaluate existing scholarship and available texts in a manner that will be available to the "nonspecialist." His approach is as one who "believe[s] in the authority of the Old Testament as the Word of God" [p. 16].

His method is to approach the literature from a genre oriented perspective; dealing first with cosmology, then personal archives and epics, then legal texts, and so forth. In each chapter he first gives as extensive a listing of extant ANE literature in that individual category that space will allow. Often this listing includes a summary of the background, nature and content of the document in question. Following the listing is a section of discussion dealing primarily with similarities and differences between the Old Testament and extant ANE literature of that particular genre. Each section concludes with a bibliography for further reading and study. The final chapter brings together the summaries and conclusions of each genre type.

Walton presents his material in a clear, well organized manner. His work is easily read while providing much insight not only into the ANE documents themselves, but also into the scholarship that has worked with them over the years. This volume is well worth reading by anyone interested in the literary nature of the Old Testament or confused by "scholarly" dogma concerning the relationship of Israel's sacred literature with that of her neighbors.

Wright, Christopher J. H., *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., The Paternoster Press, 1990, 284 pp, paper, \$ 15.95) reviewed by Charles E. McLain

This book might be described as an example of the sociological approach to Old Testament studies. However, this description would be deceiving. In his preface Wright notes the "this present work is a study of one particular dimension of Israel's society -- the economic structures concerning land, property, and dependent persons within the family. Since this involves close study of the laws, institutions, and social customs of Israel, the work is mainly descriptive and exegetical" [p. xii]. He further clarifies his purpose in his introduction stating that his aim is to take the results of the sociological and legal approaches to the subject "integrate the findings of these approaches with the theological concepts and traditions of Israel's faith so as to produce a genuinely *ethical* perspective" [p. xvi]. I believe the results of Wright's efforts would more clearly be described as an exegetical and analytical investigation of the social terrain of Old Testament Israel, centered on the themes of land and family, its members and its spheres of function and influence (i.e., the economic, social, legal, religious, etc.).

The book is well organized and very clear in its presentation. Wright first builds a foundation of theological principles; particularly in application to Israel and 'the land.' Then upon this foundation he makes specific application to individual concepts and entities, such as property owner's rights and responsibilities, wives, children, and slaves.

The book will be of great benefit for the student. The indices are well organized and extensive; the bibliography though selected is helpful; the information is well footnoted; and the discussion presents and summaries many points of view on individual issues. As in real life no issue is dealt with in isolation, but in view of its multi-faceted relationships and interactions. This is also reflected in his extensive analysis and cross referencing of Scripture.

The author has presented the spheres in which the Old Testament family functioned in a very clear and well documented way. The work is well-written and easily read. In fact, I found that I 'couldn't put the book down' once I began reading. I would highly recommend this book to any one who wishes to get a better grasp of Old Testament life for the individual or family. This book will be required reading in my Old Testament classes.

Rasmussen, Carl G., *NIV Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989, 256 pp, hard, \$39.95) reviewed by Gordon H. Lovik

While several Bible Atlases have become available in recent years, the NIV Atlas certainly deserves a place in every student's and pastor's library. The author began studying the land of Israel in 1967 and spent a number of years at the Institute of Holy Land Studies, where this reviewer met him more than a decade ago. The quality of the work is outstanding. The maps were supplied by the famous publishers, *Carta*. The photos are appropriate and of high quality. The author provides a scripture index and an index of persons along with a meaningful bibliography for further study. Also helpful is his glossary of terms unfamiliar to a reader who has not spent time studying in Israel. Of greatest help is the gazetteer and index which lists all places found in the text and describes the site in relationship to a modern location.

The volume is divided into two major sections. The first is the geographical section which relates the land of Israel to the Middle East. In discussing the geography of Israel and Jordan the author discusses the five major longitudinal zones, the weather patterns, the major natural roads, and twenty-three regions of the land. To this is added a brief survey of the geography of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, and Mesopotamia.

The historical section follows a chronological path from creation through the journeys of Paul using helpful charts and illustrations. The frequent use of maps and photographs makes following the historical discussions very informative. His conservative dating and discussions provide for hours of pleasurable reading. I completed the reading of this atlas with the feeling that I was back in Israel studying in Jerusalem and about to embark on a series of field trips with a head full of knowledge which was about to come to life.

The concluding chapter on the disciplines of historical geography is also very helpful. To understand how philology (study of place names), toponymy (study of place names), and archeology relate to geography is essential for reading most works of history and geography of ancient Israel. I consider this atlas as the best in informing those who are serious in learning the land of Israel from a Bible perspective.